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ABSTRACT

The great area of current neglect in most college and university long-range planning activities is that of academic planning. Academic planning is the primary task of any comprehensive long-range planning in a college or university. Only when academic plans and support plans become an institutional plan can the process of implementation and the careful allocation of available resources begin. Once the academic planning process has been completed or well advanced, the academic and institutional support programs can be prepared. It is essential to emphasize that academic planning is the principal determinant of a comprehensive institutional plan. Finally, it must be understood that planning is a continuous process of assisting managers throughout the academic community in their decisionmaking. A formal plan is a useful framework for guiding decisionmaking, but the plan itself is ever subject to modification as new circumstances arise and as new decisions must be made. From time to time these changes warrant comprehensive formulation of a new plan for further modification with the events of time. (Author/PG)

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LONG-RANGE PLANNING

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ACADEMIC PLANNING

This issue of *Management Forum* deals with an important and, we think, a much neglected aspect of long-range planning in colleges and universities—academic planning. The paper was prepared by John L. Yeager and Patricia J. Morrow, both of the Office of Planning at the University of Pittsburgh.

ACADEMIC PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by
John L. Yeager
and
Patricia J. Morrow

Traditionally, long-range planning by institutions of higher education has been concerned with certain quantitative aspects of operation: enrollment projections, facility needs, current expenditures, current income, and variations of these quantities. The result of this emphasis has been that resource planning has dominated attention, to the neglect of academic planning. One evidence of this emphasis is the current interest in management information systems based upon current budgetary data that feed into resource simulation models supposed to project future resource requirements.

The great area of current neglect in most college and university long-range planning activities is that of academic planning. Little if any data about academic programs are included in management information systems. Few contributions to the planning process are made by academic departments, deans, and other academic officers. Yet the functions of instruction, research, and public service remain central to the institutional enterprise. Little can be accomplished in the planning of support programs and in the planning of resource allocation without comprehensive academic planning.

Eurich and Tickton (1973) identified several essential characteristics of an adequate institutional plan, as follows:

1. A description of the institution as it currently operates.
2. A statement of goals which limits functions and makes no unrealistic commitments.
3. A set of assumptions about the future.
4. Projection of primary programs and of support programs for achieving the goals.
5. A procedure for periodic evaluation of accomplishments.
6. A statement of financial requirements for carrying out the plan.
7. Provision for an adequate and regular accounting to the constituency of an institution about how well or how poorly the institution is doing in carrying out its plan.

The components of an academic plan must describe present academic programs and must project future desired states in academic programs. The institutional academic hierarchy provides one suitable framework within which to prepare these descriptions and to make these projections. Each academic department needs a plan. Each dean of a college or of a division needs a plan. The coordination of these plans is the task of the chief academic administrator. The fact that departments and colleges may produce multi-

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ple outputs is no excuse to avoid planning. Every cost center that utilizes resources is also necessarily a planning center.

An academic plan of an institution of higher education in its whole comprises at least two parts:

A. Institutional components
   1. Societal needs and expectations
   2. Assumptions about the future
   3. A general statement of goals and missions
B. The program components
   1. Program objectives
   2. Program activity (process and output)
   3. Evaluation procedure

A basic question in any institutional plan is the extent to which the institution is responsive to external circumstances and the degree to which the institution can independently determine its response to those circumstances. Ewing (1968) has discussed the concept of outside/inside planning. If an institution is to be responsive to external needs and expectations, then these must be clearly identified and specified. On the other hand, if an institution enjoys substantial autonomy in its relationship to society, then it may properly start its planning process in terms of its own internal aspirations.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPONENTS

Societal needs and expectations are different for various kinds of institutions: public and private, affluent and not so affluent, selective and not so selective, urban and rural, comprehensive and restricted in program activity. Social needs should be analyzed in relation to the basic characteristics of the institution and in relation to the obligations assumed by the institution or expected from its circumstances.

Assumptions are hypothetical statements about conditions and factors that may reasonably be expected to occur during the time span of an academic plan. What kinds of programs will be needed and offered? What kinds of students will enroll? How will social changes affect institutional activities? How will public attitudes and expectations affect institutional operations? What kinds of resources may be available for what kinds of endeavor? These and many other critical questions must be given some tentative, prospective answers.

A general statement of goals and missions presents the institution's image, the institution's commitments as perceived by the institution. Such a statement will reflect value judgments about the institution's appropriate role, its services to society, and its obligations of performance. Such a statement will set forth the primary programs to be offered, the groups or clienteles to be served, the benefits to be disbursed. Such a statement will establish standards of performance, and guidelines for future accomplishments.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

For each program center of a college or university there are objectives to be realized. Presumably these objectives are consistent with the institutional role in society, the institutional assumptions about the future, and the goals and missions assumed by or assigned to the institution. Program goals need to be specific about outcomes; in large part these outcomes should be quantifiable. Program goals should be flexible or adjustable to meet changing needs and circumstances.

Program activity involves both work processes and work output. Presumably any given work process will produce particular work outputs. Changes in the process may mean changes in output. The process requires resources in staffing, facilities, supplies, services, and students. If the resources are not available, the work process may have to be adjusted. For example, certain academic objectives may depend upon the availability of certain particular academic persons, or of certain particular students. If these individuals are not recruited, both the work process and the work output may be substantially changed.

Objectives and activities provide little assistance in academic planning if both are not subject to evaluation in some organized manner. Those individuals involved in defining objectives and activities should at the same time define the criteria by which the quality and quantity of output are to be assessed. Program evaluation is a difficult task, but with experience it can be improved and made effective.

PLANNING PROCEDURE

Many planning commentators have expressed the opinion that the process of creating a plan can be more important to a college or university than the plan itself (Ewing, 1969). The individuals involved in preparing a plan become alert to various concerns to which previously they have been indifferent or of which they have been ignorant. Because of the collegial nature of a university and because of the autonomy of academic disciplines and other fields of study, the planning process must involve the participation of large numbers of individuals. And much of the success of the planning process depends upon the talents and interests of the individuals who are drawn into the activity.

Before academic planning is begun at the department or similar planning center in a college or university, serious thought must be given by the leadership of the institution to (1) the desired end product or kind of plan to be expected, (2) the procedures to be followed, (3) the individuals to be involved, and (4) the timing to be observed. Planning for the planning process is an indispensable element of the procedure.

The motivation for planning may arise from particular administrative leaders or from particular circumstances (Ladd, 1970). Often the threat or reality of financial deficits prompts a new interest in planning. Sometimes external pressures for new instructional programs or other activities encourage a new attention to planning. Enrollment changes suggest a need to plan. The factors which promote planning will necessarily affect the procedure and the end product. Whatever the motivating concern the planning procedure should involve the participation of faculty, students, staff,

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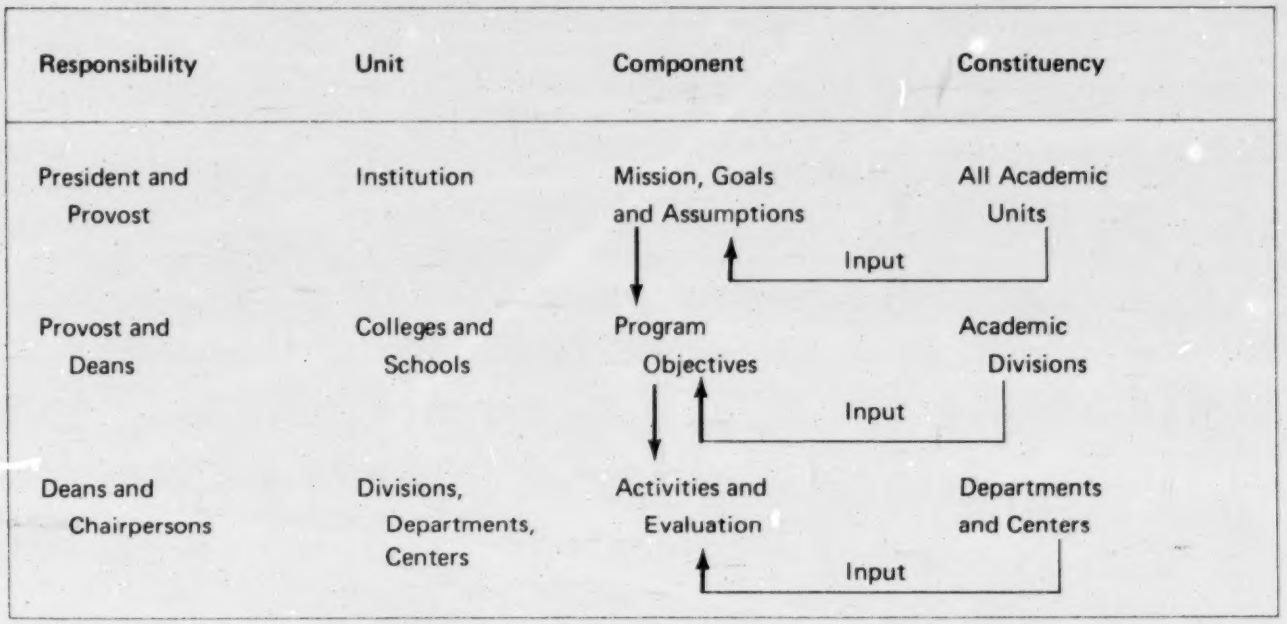
administration, and trustees.

A frequently employed procedure is for the administration of a college or university to appoint an extensive number of *ad hoc* study committees to prepare component parts of an institutional plan (Ladd, 1972). Unless such groups have a specific charge and a clear understanding of what is expected of them, the planning results will be unfocused and haphazard. The charge needs to be realistic; the assignment must be one the group can reasonably be expected to accomplish. Each group must understand how it relates to other groups. The study group also needs some guidelines about how far it is to go in proposing new goals, new policies, and new programs. The usual representative nature of study committees often makes it difficult to arrive at any general consensus. But such a committee can be useful as a device for liaison and feedback between central administration and various academic interest.

There is some uncertainty in many colleges and universities about the location of authority to make final decisions about an institutional plan. In private institutions this authority legally is vested in the board of trustees; in a public university this authority may lie with the governing board of a multi-campus system, with a state-wide higher education board, or with the governor and general assembly of the state. An academic plan involving instructional programs and other faculty outputs must necessarily express some faculty agreements as well since so much authority in the educational process has been delegated in fact to faculties in both their collegial and individual roles.

Without question, however, it is the administrative leadership of a college or university that must guide and encourage every step of the planning procedure. The planning process cannot hope to achieve any notable results without such leadership. The academic departments provide their special knowledge and experience. The administration provides information about total resources and about necessary support programs. And the administration must bring about the coherence between academic objectives and activities and institutional circumstances which constitute an institutional plan.

Perhaps the interrelationships of planning procedure can best be indicated by means of a diagram.



The planning procedure today must be particularly concerned with student numbers, attitudes, expectations, and needs. Information about the attitudes and experiences of recent alumni can also be quite helpful. Surveys, interviews, and statistical data will not provide definitive data, since the art of such analysis and of the inferences to be drawn from such analysis is still imperfect. Yet the information thus obtained can be very useful.

Moreover, faculty attitudes also play a major role in determining the characteristics and possibilities of a college or university. If an academic plan tends to contradict prevailing faculty attitudes, interests, and competencies, the chances for successful implementation of such a plan are minimal. In the long run a college or university can only accomplish what the faculty members are willing and able to accomplish.

There is a great deal of discussion today about simulation models, analytical models, efficiency, effectiveness, cost benefit analysis, and accountability in academic planning and management. These concepts and practices reflect the preoccupation of academic communities with their financial resources in a time of reduced or stabilized enrollments, violent inflation, general economic uncertainties, reduced federal governmental funding, and difficulties of income. Most faculty members are ignorant or distrustful of these sophisticated and presumably "scientific" techniques. Moreover, faculty members by and large continue to place

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"academic quality" at or near the top of their personal commitment. Academic planning must find a way to reconcile faculty commitment with new techniques of information analysis and institutional responsibility.

The over-all time span of planning activity should be established before the planning procedure begins. The development of a so-called long-range plan must have a prearranged beginning and end point. Several years ago it was not unusual in colleges and universities to talk about ten-year plans. More recently, because of the intrusion of unexpected changes in society affecting higher education performance, it is customary to talk about five-year plans.

It takes time to prepare a five-year or a ten-year plan, especially if it is an initial plan and involves the development of a new planning procedure. Eighteen months is probably a minimum time requirement to prepare an initial plan. Subsequent revisions or up-dates should take less time.

The planning procedure, to be most effective, must be a continuous one. Even when efforts are directed to producing "a plan," administrators and others must be prepared at any time to alter the plan as circumstances dictate. A plan once formulated is at best only a guideline to action. The action must always be subject to change.

SUMMARY

As more and more colleges and universities recognize the utility of long-range plans and the value of the planning process for the viability of the institution itself, greater attention will be given to the planning activity. Academic planning is the primary task of any comprehensive long-range planning in a college or university. Only when an academic plan has been prepared with care can the supporting plans be formulated. And only when academic plans and support plans become an institutional plan can the process of implementation and the careful allocation of available resources begin.

The development of an academic plan requires the participation of constituencies both within and outside the academic community. Societal needs and expectations must be examined and formulated, assumptions about the social and political and economic environment of a college or university must be identified, and the missions and goals of the institution must be made explicit. Within this broad context academic program objectives, program activities, and program evaluation must be developed.

Once the academic planning process has been completed or well advanced, the academic and institutional support programs can be prepared. It is essential to emphasize that academic planning is the principal determinant of a comprehensive institutional plan.

Finally, it must be understood that planning does not end with the completion of a plan. Planning is a continuous process of assisting managers throughout the academic community in their decision-making. A formal plan is a useful framework for guiding decision-making, but the plan itself is ever subject to modification as new circumstances arise and as new decisions must be made. From time to time these changes warrant comprehensive formulation of a new plan for further modification with the events of time.

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